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AUTHOR	Freer, Kevin J.
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ABSTRACT

The role of literacy volunteers has taken on new dimensions due to national policy changes and changing views of literacy providers. The fifth National Education Goal, which stated that by the year 2000 every adult American will be literate, has resulted in increased interest in adult literacy programs. The role of the adult new reader is changing as learner-centered approaches become more widespread. Student inputs in program management, goal setting, board policy, and publication of student writings are examples of learner participation. Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy Action are trying new approaches to tutor training and producing materials to help local programs with quality and accountability. College student participation as volunteer tutors is on the rise, spurred by the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education (SCALE) and the federally funded Student Literacy Corps. Recent developments have raised a number of issues regarding literacy volunteers: equity and access, learner involvement mandated by judicial systems and state assistance programs, program evaluation and learner assessment, partnerships and coalitions, resistance to change, and conflicting research agendas. (Contains 14 references.) (SK)

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Kevin J. Freer

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

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DIGEST
NO. 132

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

Adult Literacy Volunteers

by Kevin J. Freer

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The role of literacy volunteers has taken on new dimensions and importance due to recent policy changes on the national level and changing views of program management and instruction by literacy providers. The National Literacy Act of 1991 provides volunteer literacy programs access to public funds previously not available to community-based organizations. In addition, the fifth educational goal stating that by the year 2000 every adult American will be literate has resulted in a resurgence of interest in adult literacy that is affecting volunteer programs. This *ERIC Digest* provides an overview of recent changes being made by adult literacy volunteer programs. These changes are reflected in new roles for learners, revisions of tutor training materials, concern for quality in volunteer management, and increased participation by campus organizations. Issues related to these changes and recent legislation that affects literacy volunteerism are highlighted.

Collaborative Roles for Learners

As literacy volunteer groups develop learner-centered approaches, the roles of adult new readers have taken on new forms. This includes management of programs and staff positions, goal setting with tutors, board representation, literacy advocacy, and instructional leadership (Fingeret and Jurmo 1989). Adult literacy students have formed a national organization, Gather, that is run entirely by learners themselves. Laubach Literacy Action (LLA) has played a major role by sponsoring the first Adult Literacy Congress and by working with Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (LVA) and others to develop opportunities for student leadership. In 1993 LLA has increased its scope of commitment to the Congress by assigning a full-time staff person as coordinator. LVA's *Student Involvement Guidelines* (1989) is an example of increased focus on learner-centered programs.

The literacy initiative of the National Issues Forum is another example of how learners are participating in discussions of issues of national importance. Staff positions, training, book discussion clubs, student support groups, board membership, and attendance at local and national conferences are examples of the active roles learners are taking with volunteer programs. Gaining a voice through their writing is in keeping with a learner-centered, whole language philosophy. "New Readers Speaking Out," a nationally distributed, quarterly newsletter begun in 1986 by LLA, is written for and by new readers. New Readers Press has a two-volume text of new reader writing, *First Impressions*. Local literacy programs are involving learners in similar ways.

New Approaches to Tutor Training

Another development has been in the area of new tutor training approaches that reflect current thinking in adult literacy education. In keeping with its learner-centered philosophy and whole language approach to literacy, LVA led the field with its small group/collaborative approach to tutoring (Cheatham and Lawson 1990). After a national field test of this model, guides and handbooks are being revised. Other special focus areas have received attention by LVA in their new training for family literacy, corrections, and for disabled workers. Their English as a second language (ESL) materials will be revised in 1994. The *Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ)* test (1986) is being rewritten and placed within an integrated assessment approach that will include development of portfolios for individual learners.

LLA is producing a new set of basic literacy tutor training materials that are not dependent on any one curriculum but offer training modules on a variety of general reading and writing issues as well as modules from the New Readers Press reading curriculum, *Laubach Way to Reading (LWR)* (Laubach, Kirk, and Laubach 1991) and *Challenger Adult Reading Series* (Murphy 1985). The primary instructional approach in LLA's new basic literacy tutor training will be a local option, not necessarily the LWR. LLA is developing new ESL tutor training materials scheduled for release in 1994. The *LLA Certification Manual* (1992) can be used by program managers or trainers to review existing training and/or design new training.

Quality and Accountability

Demands for increased attention to both quality and accountability are being made on volunteer literacy programs. The two national literacy volunteer programs have responded to these demands with additional training and materials for local programs. New Readers Press, the publishing arm of LLA, has produced a new Program Management Information Series that addresses administrative and management issues. LLA also has plans for training and technical assistance and support in the design of tutor training based on the assessment of learner needs. A three-part video management training series has been produced jointly by LVA and LLA (Trabert, Lawson and Church 1988). LVA has field tested a volunteer management system for the last 3 years (DuPrey 1992). This 50/50 management theory recognizes the need to devote an equal amount of time and resources to both intake and support functions of a volunteer literacy program. LVA is instituting a quality improvement program throughout their network with this training.

Campus Involvement

The Student Literacy Corps Program begun in 1989 has dramatically influenced campus involvement in literacy. Funded by the Higher Education Act, this program grew out of recent interest in promoting community service, experiential learning, and volunteerism among college students. Students were already active in this area and were organizing through the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education (SCALE). SCALE, a national network of college and university students, administrators, faculty, and community agencies who are committed to increased literacy in the United States, encourages and supports students in program development, awareness, and advocacy. SCALE is aware of the politics of college literacy programs and has developed resources for campus programs dealing with mapping out who is involved in literacy, meeting resistance to campus programs, and building collaborative partnerships between the campus and the community (Swartz 1992).

Resources have been developed to encourage participatory programs by diverse stakeholders and to institutionalize Student Literacy Corps programs through student leadership (Meacham 1990; Strubel 1991; Thorp, Shearer, and Allen 1992). Their publications and training involve new readers in program management and decision making and seek to develop college student leadership in literacy volunteer programs. Literacy Impact (Presler 1992), a national campaign to promote college student involvement in literacy, will begin nationwide in 1993.

Adult Literacy Volunteer Issues

Recent developments in literacy legislation as well as thinking in whole language, learner-centered, and participatory approaches to adult literacy have raised further issues facing literacy volunteers:

Equity and Access. With passage of the National Literacy Act of 1991, methods for effectively integrating volunteer programs into a state's comprehensive system for adult education need to be developed. This includes the ability to obtain funding, involvement in the development of state indicators of program quality, planning for the State Literacy Resource Centers, participation in development of and recent amendments to state plans mandated by the Adult Education Act, and service on State Advisory Councils.

Mandatory Learning. The number of learners being referred to volunteer programs from judicial systems and state assistance programs is increasing, often without increased resources. Although programs wish to collaborate fully with the courts and social service agencies, they often must do so without clear working agreements. Volunteers are being asked to document attendance and learner progress. Mandatory involvement puts a new face on volunteerism and volunteer expectations.

Accountability. Program evaluation and learner assessment will increasingly be issues for literacy volunteer programs, due to increased visibility, acceptance of public and private funds with demands for measurable outcomes, mandated learner participation due to welfare reform, and changing roles of learners in participatory programs. Debate over quantitative versus qualitative assessment procedures will continue as portfolio assessment research and practice gain wider acceptance for youth in the K-12 curriculum. Participatory programs will also demand different roles for program participants in these processes.

Partnerships and Coalitions. Literacy volunteer programs will be expected to form partnerships and coalitions among themselves and with other providers due to several recent developments related to public policy and funding changes, including funding for training and materials that can be shared by the national literacy organizations. A recent National Volunteer Literacy Campaign Training Project sponsored by the Coors Literacy Foundation to increase the training capacity of LVA and LLA is such an example. State adult education plans and subsequent funding may require adult basic and literacy education programs to develop or form partnerships with community-based literacy volunteer programs. Recent experiences with campus literacy groups reveal that roles and responsibilities of each of these partners or members of broader coalitions have yet to be worked out clearly in theory and practice.

Resistance to Change. Local programs and volunteers often reflect the traditions of their respective national organizations. Although many program managers, board members, trainers, tutors, and learners are anticipating new methods and materials, some may need time to adjust to the changes underway in their organizations. Volunteer trainers may need additional time and assistance with these new teaching strategies. Students themselves have become dependent on their tutors and may have to learn to participate in more collaborative small group settings as well. It takes time to train volunteers to help them reach new comfort levels within their own organizations. Despite a strong movement toward professionalization, many volunteers have not received professional training and support.

Research. Participatory models of literacy education will include participatory/action research models in the volunteer organizations. These methodologies may conflict with the values and understanding of program funders and the stakeholders themselves. Research agendas for programs with adult literacy volunteers need to be developed apart from those not using volunteers. This research will have to find ways to work with diverse populations to meet community needs.

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